

OPEN AND SHUT?

Wednesday, February 08, 2012

Elsevier's Alicia Wise on the RWA, the West Wing, and Universal Access

In recent years I have noticed that it is pretty difficult for journalists not attached to big media to obtain interviews with Elsevier executives – except where the purpose of the interview is to talk about a new product, or the company's latest financial results. Certainly, Elsevier has appeared very reluctant to talk about Open Access (OA).

This led me to conclude that the company believes it only needs to talk to two groups of people: its shareholders and its customers – where customer implies not the researchers whose papers provide the content published in its journals, but the librarians who purchase those journals, invariably by means of the controversial **Big Deal** (aka “bundling”).

All changed



Alicia Wise

If my conclusion was correct, it seems safe to say that this has all changed in the past month or so. And the reason why is clear: At the end of last year a new bill was introduced into the US House of Representatives called the Research Works Act (RWA).

Co-sponsored by Representatives **Darrell Issa** (R-CA) and **Carolyn Maloney** (D-NY), the RWA would reverse the **Public Access Policy** introduced in 2005 by the US National Institutes of Health (NIH). This policy requires that taxpayer-funded research is made freely accessible online with 12 months of publication. The bill would also prevent any other federal agency from imposing a similar requirement on the researchers it funds. As such, the RWA would pose a significant threat to the Open Access movement.

Shortly after its introduction, the Association of American Publishers (AAP) – an organisation of which Elsevier is a **senior member** – published a **press release** welcoming the new bill. The RWA, it said, is “aimed at preventing regulatory interference with private-sector research publishers in the production, peer review and publication of scientific, medical, technical, humanities, legal and scholarly journal articles.”

However, the problem is that the research community views things rather differently, and so news of the bill quickly ignited a firestorm of protest, especially amongst OA advocates.

This firestorm was lit by **Michael Eisen**, the US biologist who co-founded the open access publisher Public Library of Science (PLOS). On January 10th, Eisen published an **editorial** in the *New York Times* in which he complained, amongst other things that, “If the bill passes, to read the results of federally funded research, most Americans would have to buy access to individual articles at a cost of \$15 or \$30 apiece. In other words, taxpayers who already paid for the research would have to pay again to read the results.”

At the centre of the row lies a profound disagreement about the way in which research papers should be disseminated on the Web. In order to share their research, scientists have traditionally handed over (without payment) exclusive rights to distribute their papers to scholarly publishers like Elsevier. These publishers then sell this taxpayer-funded research back to the research community in the form of journal subscriptions. As a result, argue OA advocates, the taxpayer pays twice, first for the research to be done, and second for scientists (and members of the public) to read the results of that research. While

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Open Access: “Information wants to be free?”
(A print version of this eBook is

available here) Earlier this year I was invited to discuss with Georgia Institute of Technology librarians...



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Richard Poynder
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Richard Poynder
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2h

The State of
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this may have been necessary in a print world, they say, it is no longer necessary in an online world

In recent years, therefore, a new form of publishing has emerged in which publishers levy a one-off article-processing charge, and then make the papers they publish freely available on the Web — a model known as open-access publishing, or **Gold OA**.

For researchers still publishing in subscription journals, funders like the NIH are increasingly introducing mandates requiring that their papers are made freely available on the Web via self-archiving, or **Green OA** — normally after an embargo period intended to allow the publisher to recoup the costs of managing the peer-review process.

Subscription publishers like Elsevier complain that OA mandates threaten their livelihood (and thus, they add, the entire peer-reviewed journal system). Moreover, they add, mandates introduced by federal agencies amount to government interference in the market. The research community counters that there is no evidence that mandates impact on publishers' profits and, in any case, publishers' profits are too high.

Boycott

The AAP has some 300 members. Yet it is Elsevier that has borne the brunt of the criticism. This is partly because Elsevier is the largest scholarly publisher in the world; partly because it has a reputation for charging very high subscriptions for its journals; partly because it resisted Open Access for so long, and so obdurately; and partly because other AAP members quickly began to disavow the RWA.

Amongst AAP members to distance themselves from the RWA are **MIT Press**, **Pennsylvania State University Press**, **Rockefeller University Press**, **University of California Press**, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAA), publisher of the well-known scientific journal **Science**.

It did not help Elsevier that just days before his NYT editorial, Eisen reported on his blog that senior executives at the company had made **31 contributions** to US representatives in 2011, 12 of which went to Representative Maloney. "This includes contributions from 11 senior executives or partners, only one of whom is a resident of her district," wrote Eisen.

Subsequently, others pointed out that Issa too has been the recipient of political donations from Elsevier executives.

As the cries of rage echoing around the Web grew louder, a number of petitions were started calling for the bill to be rejected (e.g. [here](#) and [here](#)). More ominously, a **site** was created where researchers can publicly commit to boycott Elsevier — by refusing to publish in, or referee and/or perform editorial services for its journals. If the boycott were to become widespread, it would pose a serious problem for Elsevier, since it would dam the flow of papers into its journals, with obvious implications for its revenues. After all, how could a publisher sell subscriptions to a journal that had few or no papers in it?

In fact, at the time of writing the number of signatories to the boycott stands at just 4,573. This does not compare favourably with the 34,000 signatures collected during a **similar boycott** frenzy in 2001, although the earlier one was directed at all journal publishers not just Elsevier.

Nevertheless, the boycott has at least got Elsevier's attention. Conscious of the potential harm that it could have on its business were it to escalate, Elsevier has been stung into responding to the campaign of vilification. In early January, for instance, Elsevier's vice president of global corporate relations **Tom Reller** posted several **rebuttals** on Eisen's blog, and Elsevier's director of universal access **Alicia Wise** posted a **defence** of the company on the **Liblicense mailing list**.

And as the mainstream media has begun to take notice of the boycott, Reller has been compelled to respond not only on mailing lists and blogs (e.g. the *Scholarly Kitchen*), but in the pages of prestigious print publications like *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Meanwhile, Elsevier's director of global academic relations **Nick Fowler** has found himself having to defend the company's pricing policy in the *Economist*, and the

Alternatives, explained why he believes the var...



PLOS CEO Alison Mudditt discusses new OA agreement with the University of

California

The Public Library of Science (PLOS) and the University of California (UC) have today announced a two-year agreement designed to make...



The Open Access Interviews: Publisher MDPI Headquartered in Basel,

Switzerland, the Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, or more usually MDPI, is an open access publisher...



The OA Interviews: Taylor & Francis' Deborah Kahn discusses Dove

Medical Press

Please note the postscript to this interview here The open-access publisher Dove Medical Press has a controversial past and I have writ...



Copyright: the immovable barrier that open access advocates underestimated

In calling for research papers to be made freely available open access advocates promised that doing so would lead to a simpler, less cos...



The Open Access Interviews: OMICS Publishing Group's Srinu

Babu Gedela

***Update: On August 26th 2016, the US government (Federal Trade Commission) announced that it has charged OMICS with making false claims, ...



Robin Osborne on the state of Open Access: Where are we, what still needs to be done?

One of a series exploring the current state of Open Access (OA), the Q&A below is with Robin Osborne, Professor of Ancient History a...



Community Action Publishing: Broadening the Pool

We are today seeing growing dissatisfaction with the pay-to-publish model

company's senior vice president for physical sciences [David Clark](#) has had to do the same in *The Scientist*.

Elsewhere, [Chrysanne Lowe](#), Elsevier's VP global marketing communications, has been [helping in the pushback](#) on Liblicense.

In short, Elsevier now appears to understand that it needs to talk to the world. As Clark told *The Scientist*, "I look at the current situation, and we just need to do a better job of communicating about who we are, what we want to achieve, and how we value access and dissemination."

As I [suggested](#) recently, the challenge for Elsevier is that this new willingness to engage with the outside world may prove to be too little too late – a point I made to Reller and Alicia Wise when I [met them](#) in London earlier this year. To their credit, they acknowledged my point, and promised to arrange for me to do a formal interview with Alicia.

Moreover, this is not just about Elsevier talking. It also needs to listen. It has become increasingly evident that by not engaging with the wider world for so long, it has become dangerously out of touch with how it is perceived.

For this reason it was deeply shocked by the visceral reaction to the RWA, and at the end of last week felt it necessary to publish [an explanation](#) of why it supports the bill on its web site. This ends by saying: "[I]t is our sincere wish to de-escalate from the constant cycle of legislation and lobbying that has marked the scholarly communication landscape for many years, and accelerate collaborative work in partnership with other stakeholders."

Given this background, when my interview with Wise was eventually scheduled I felt it would be useful to set any discussion we had about the RWA in the larger context of the changes taking place in the scholarly communication landscape – not least the rapid growth in Open Access – and to explore whether and how Elsevier views its role changing going forward. The RWA, after all, is merely a symptom of these changes.

I was also curious to find out what exactly "universal access" is, how it differs from Open Access, and why Wise had chosen to "change sides" – moving from a role managing national licensing deals with publishers on behalf of the research community at [JISC](#), to sitting on the other side of the table representing the interests of the world's largest publisher.

Q&A

To this end, I put together a long list of questions, a list I realised might be a little longer than the company was anticipating, and emailed it over to Wise in advance.

Wise did indeed seem a little surprised at the nature and number of the questions, and suggested that rather than doing a telephone interview with me, she give written responses to my questions.

Clearly, such an approach is not ideal when trying to discuss controversial issues, but an email Q&A is surely better than nothing. Moreover, Wise indicated that she would be happy for me to send back a few follow-up questions if I felt it was necessary. In the event, I sent four follow-up questions.

The attached pdf file is the result. It covers a lot of issues, and so is on the long side. For those who might prefer a bullet point summary of some of the main issues discussed, I list below a few excerpted quotes from Wise's answers. Those wishing to read the full interview should click on the link at the bottom of the page (or [here](#)).

The hanging question, I would suggest, is this: While Elsevier now appears committed to talking more with the wider world, is it equally committed to listening?

*** Alicia Wise on whether Elsevier now accepts the inevitability of Open Access:**

We believe open access is here to stay, and that it will be part of the balance of sustainable business models that publishers use.

for open access. As this requires authors (or their funders or ins...



Open Access:
What should the priorities be today?

This year marks the 15 th

anniversary of the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI), the meeting that led to the launch of the open acce...

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*** On whether Elsevier nevertheless remains uncomfortable with Green OA (self-archiving):**

This isn't quite right, in my view. Elsevier is business model neutral as long as the business model is sustainable and maintains quality. Gold open access can do this. Green open access is more of a challenge because it is not associated with a funding stream of any kind. This means green open access can be sustainable, but only if it works in harmony with another business model that provides revenue to support publication costs.

*** On Elsevier's self-archiving policy:**

Our policy on self-archiving depends on the version of the article to be posted and whether or not there is a mandate or other systematic encouragement/requirement to post.

Authors are free to post preprints, they can post accepted manuscripts to websites or institutional repositories where they do so voluntarily or we have an agreement with their institution/funder, and we do not permit the posting of final published journal articles.

*** On whether Elsevier has been "putting the frighteners" on research institutions with threats of copyright litigation as a result of their self-archiving activities:**

We do keep an eye on the contents of repositories, and from time to time send requests for items to be taken down if they do not align with ... [our] ... policy. This has only been necessary a small number of times. The take down requests are written by me, not our legal team, and are very politely and respectfully worded. In all cases, the repository managers have removed the material, and so far as I'm aware no one has felt frightened!

I suppose if our polite take down requests were ignored then this could result in a more formal legal letter being sent. However, this isn't our aim. Our aim is to find ways to work with institutions to expand access in ways sustainable for the journal.

*** On whether, in its frequent claim that 93% of researchers globally find gaining access to research papers "fairly or very easy", Elsevier has been citing its own survey data without acknowledging as much, and shielding this "self-citation" by attributing the data to the Publishing Research Consortium:**

[Our] involvement is made transparent, for example in the report itself, and the involvement of Elsevier staff in a wide array of industry committees and bodies including the PRC is very transparent as well. I don't believe we're leading anyone to conclude that we weren't involved but your point is well taken and I'll talk with my colleagues about being more explicit and clear when we cite these findings.

*** On open-access mandates like the NIH Public Access Policy:**

We, like most publishers, do have some concerns about mandates and in particular government mandates. We prefer to work in consensual ways and are always willing to work in partnership with others.

...

The key issue is with the US Government dictating what is done with the articles we publish. Putting an article online for free has economic consequences for the publisher because it effectively takes away returns that a publisher earns from the value it has added and the investment it has made. And it has the potential to make a journal unsustainable. When a journal is unsustainable, the research community that relies on it loses.

*** On Elsevier's claim that the NIH mandate "seeks to adopt copyright policies that are intended to override or undermine the agreements between authors or publishers", despite the fact that the mandate operates upstream of authors signing any agreement with publishers:**

NIH's policy procedure asserts itself into the grant mechanisms prior to the creation of the article, and thus before the creation of copyright in the first place. However the NIH policy (and the policy of some other funders and employers) is intended to place a "lien" on the ultimate intellectual property

2008 (14)

2007 (9)

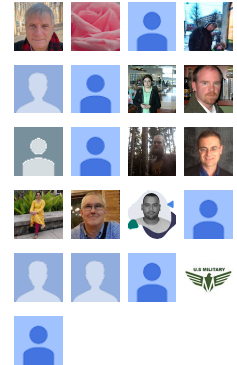
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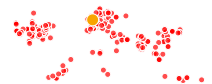
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that is produced, and thus undermines the general principles of copyright. Other funders and employers attempt to override existing agreements through various means.

*** On Elsevier's support for the Research Works Act (RWA):**

Elsevier, along with other publishers and publishing Trade Associations, lobbied for the bill to be introduced ... [W]e don't believe that the government should tell authors and publishers what we can do with our publications. Our support for the Research Works Act is about our concern over government regulation, not access ... The bill would prevent inflexible government mandates, and keep such mandates from spreading ... We believe that government mandates are unnecessary and that there are better ways to provide access including to taxpayers.

*** On whether the RWA is an attempt to create a new right:**

Publishers add the greatest concrete value in journal articles when and as we coordinate the review, consideration, addition of text and references, and other production and distribution mechanisms, and we think that RWA acknowledges this. Of course copyright arises on the creation of an article, and journals add other value to the scholarly communication system by for example fostering editorial perspective and viewpoints, aims and scope, and the like.

*** On the growing number of AAP members publicly disavowing the RWA:**

From the public statements I have seen it appears that a majority of publishers support the principles underlying the RWA (i.e. no government mandates) even if they do not agree with the legislation itself.

*** On whether Elsevier's relationship with its authors may have been irrevocably damaged as a result of the RWA:**

What I was rather surprised about is that other publishers stepped back from public support of the RWA at the first hint of controversy. While perhaps understandable this left Elsevier, unfairly I think, isolated and the sole focus for some anger. We value all of our relationships and hope through better communication and engagement they can continue to be nurtured and strengthened.

*** On the financial contributions made by Elsevier executives to the co-sponsors of the RWA:**

*I have personally learned more about such things since Michael Eisen's blog. We don't have a television at home, and I've never watched the *West Wing*, but had I done so, my colleagues assure me, I would understand more about the American political process.*

As a person who lives in Britain, I was initially surprised by the campaign donations. However I am told that, while not uncontroversial with all in America, such donations are commonplace. They are personal donations, not reimbursed by the company, and are perfectly allowable in the American political system provided that they are made transparently. It is in fact this transparency that made it so easy to see that Elsevier staff members had made contributions.

*It should perhaps be no surprise that employees might support a candidate that is interested in their industry. I am told that many academics also make contributions to American politicians, for example through *Political Action Committees*. I do know that *SPARC* [an Open Access organisation] lobbies for legislation, but I do not know specifically how this is done or whether financial contributions are made.*

*** On whether Elsevier's lobbying activities are problematic:**

I've heard this a lot over the years, and so when I joined Elsevier I was intrigued to learn about our supposedly enormous lobbying machine. In reality we have a very small government affairs team, and they are all very nice people. There is unfortunately a somewhat adversarial style of public debate in the US, and I guess American politics would have to change in order for all people/organisations affected by it to change.

Personally, I am a pragmatist and believe people/organisations should get on with listening to each other and solving problems in win-win ways. Unfortunately, that's not always possible.

*** On whether Elsevier accepts that it inevitably faces declining revenues, and thus profits, going forward?**

No we don't accept that. While Elsevier, and other publishers, are committed to quality and keeping pace with the growth in research outputs, we are also mindful of the financial pressures on our customers.

Rejections rates for journals are actually going up, which is an indication that our editors are being more selective about quality. Our goal is to provide customers with value for money: we constantly drive down the cost/access for high quality information.

*** On the role that Elsevier can be expected to play in the distribution of scholarly research in the future:**

I hope very much that Elsevier will continue to play a vibrant role, but of course no organization has a right to survive and to thrive we must continue to serve real needs and add real value. I very much hope in future that Elsevier can communicate more and better as it is sometimes rather harshly portrayed and a bit misunderstood.

####

If you wish to read the interview with Alicia Wise, please click on the link below.

I am publishing the interview under a Creative Commons licence, so you are free to copy and distribute it as you wish, so long as you credit me as the author, do not alter or transform the text, and do not use it for any commercial purpose.

To read the interview (as a PDF file) click [HERE](#).

Posted by Richard Poynder at [10:49](#)



Labels: [Elsevier](#), [Mandates](#), [Research Works Act](#)

20 comments:

Bjoern Brembs said...

This comment just blew me away: "[W]e don't believe that the government should tell authors and publishers what we can do with our publications. "

Basically, I'm not even going to read the rest of her answers. My publications are mine and my co-authors and not yours, Elsevier! And quite frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn about what paper I signed that made you think you owned my work.

February 08, 2012 12:41 pm



Unknown said...

Quite an achievement in getting someone authoritative from Elsevier to talk with the plebs. I have spent years trying to get a "discourse" and effectively been treated with as an inferior being who doesn't merit even the courtesies of replies.

I am afraid I have got to the state where I no longer believe any of the things that Elsevier (and many other publishers) say. You caught them out on their self-citation trick - it's full of it. I am going to comment on their principles of content mining

http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/intro.cws_home/contentmining - they portray themselves as the saviour of the world "Elsevier wants to support our customers to advance science and health.

We want to help them realise the maximum benefit from our content and enhance insight and understanding through content mining." Fantastic! It's just that it's so utterly wrong compared with the way they treated me over 2 years trying to get access to textmining. You can see in this document they are developing a new juicy market - "we'll charge them to

read the articles and THEN we'll charge them again to get their machines to read them".

Why are so few people upset about this?

Peter Murray-Rust

February 08, 2012 1:38 pm 

Richard Jones said...

Even several years after dealings with Alicia at her previous post in the JISC, the responses are instantly recognisable as hers. Give an appearance of being polite, innocent and open in public; be rather less conciliatory when dealing with people and organisations (and also some of her work colleagues) in a less public setting. Which is perhaps why she is a perfect fit for a public, senior, role in Elsevier.

"Our goal is to provide customers with value for money: we constantly drive down the cost/access for high quality information." No, Alicia; your sole goal is to maximise profit for the parent company, as consistently demonstrated over the years.

The part about not knowing about American politics made me laugh out loud. It is strange that Ms Wise regaled us with her detailed analysis of the financial aspects of the Bush vs Gore election fight in 2000, before one JISC programme meeting, for someone who claims not to know about things. I think you will find that Ms Wise has possessed a deep knowledge of things financial in American business and politics.

Alicia's responses do not surprise me, and I suspect they will not surprise some or many of her previous work colleagues. Only the most gullible would award them credibility. Thank you for posting them.

February 08, 2012 1:52 pm 



KF said...

Fantastic post. Can I take issue with one small point, however?

In recent years, therefore, a new form of publishing has emerged in which publishers levy a one-off article-processing charge, and then make the papers they publish freely available on the Web — a model known as open-access publishing, or Gold OA.

This author-pays business model is one possible form of Gold OA publishing, but it doesn't exhaust the possibilities. Other models do exist, including Open Journal Systems-run publications that often operate entirely on volunteer labor.

It's a small side point in what is otherwise a vital discussion, but it's important to maintain that broader view of what open-access publishing can be, particularly for benefit of those fields (such as those in the humanities) that will never have the resources to support author-pays publishing.

February 08, 2012 2:36 pm 



CagefreeScience said...

Peter, I think this is a general major problem in scientific community: people get used to the reality as it is and don't have enough courage and/or diligence to change anything. They take system for granted. They adapt. It shows up not only in the way how they not react to this particular issue, but also to a review process both in journals and NIH grants and how science is being funded.

February 08, 2012 2:50 pm 

peter murray-rust said...

@Cagefree

You are probably factually correct - scientists are losing their spine. But the world isn't. That's why we have to take science out beyond the walls of academia.

petermr

February 08, 2012 3:12 pm 

Anonymous said...

Just a small reminder: Gold OA is not as described here, or rather, it is not limited to what is being described here. Gold OA is publishing in Open Access without any a priori thesis about the means used to pay for scholarly and scientific publications. Gold OA is agnostic as to the financial model used, and such a model can range from the author(proxy)-pay to total subsidies from whatever source, including, of course, governmental sources.

Scielo is an important example of Gold OA (more than 800 journals), without direct costs either to authors or readers, and, so far at least, it has lived exclusively on the basis of subsidies.

To those who speak in terms of business models and sustainability, I would like to add that scientific research itself is unsustainable without large governmental subsidies, and this has been the case since at least the 17th century. Furthermore, the lifecycle of research is meaningless without publishing, which means that publishing is an integral part of research. This also means that there is no reason why publishing should be treated differently from the rest of the research process. It should be subsidized at least as much as scientific research itself is subsidized. Moreover, in many countries, large governmental subsidies are already present to support scientific publishing.

Finally, let us remember that the cost of publishing, in the case of science, is about 1%, which means that the money is already essentially there, especially if existing subsidies are taken into account.

The economy of knowledge production fundamentally rests on the free circulation of results and data. Anything that slows down this process ends up slowing down the process of science itself. Putting a price on scientific results is such a barrier and, rather than being taken as the default, for-granted, normal, position, it should justify itself. It should in fact demonstrate that it is absolutely necessary. However, thousands of good journals produced in contexts other than commercial demonstrate that commercialism is not absolutely necessary. Alternatives to the commercial world exist and they serve the ends of science better. And a lot of public money can be directed in that direction rather than the direction of extremely profitable companies."

Jean-Claude Guéron

February 08, 2012 3:27 pm 

Alicia Wise said...

Richard Jones,

Unfortunately I don't remember you, and clearly made a bad impression. Ad hominem comments are not really helpful to this, or any, discussion.

No company can be solely focussed on profits, but I suspect we will have to agree to disagree on this point.

- Alicia

February 08, 2012 5:54 pm 



Unknown said...

There's an error in this article -- fourth paragraph in, where it says "Co-sponsored by Representatives Darrell Issa (D-NY) and Carolyn Maloney (R-CA)," their reported constituencies are incorrect. Carolyn Maloney is from NY, and Issa is from California.

February 08, 2012 5:55 pm 



Richard Poynder said...

@Joe

Thanks for pointing that out. I have fixed it.

February 08, 2012 6:07 pm 

Richard Jones said...

Alicia,

My post was not a personal attack. I could have loaded it with factually-correct anecdotes and, indeed, made it a long, personal, specific attack. However, this would be a distraction from the core issue here, which is Elsevier's morally and ethically bankrupt practice with respect to

knowledge ownership and costs.

I am not surprised that you (patronisingly) "don't remember" me. I'm one of the little people in academia, spending many hundreds of hours of my own - unpaid - time producing and reviewing content for no remittance. Just to stay in the same job, as that's how the system works. Meanwhile, your company directly profits from selling the product of my (in)voluntary labour, and you sit there on a six figure salary, effectively paid for by my work and the work of many academics like me. The little people who you don't remember, Alicia.

You are right on just one thing. We'll have to agree to disagree on Elsevier's sole focus on profit.

I'm done here. There are other people, with a sense of ethic and moral direction, who engage in more satisfying and honest debate.

Regards,
Richard

February 09, 2012 1:25 pm 



Hans Pfeiffenberger said...

Thank you, Richard, for this most revealing interview. Is it my poor feel for the English language or does Wise not sense an awkwardness when she relays an answer from Reller containing the phrase "to educate the Congresswoman"?

I felt the urge to think about the educational material - and a stack of Dollar bills came to my mind.

February 09, 2012 7:39 pm 



leo waaijers said...

Thanks for this excellent interview Richard. It shows that Elsevier is not in the least impressed by all the commotion. For that more pressure is needed.

I suggest the following action. Make a list of Elsevier's 2000 editors-in-chief and match it with the current 5000+ boycotters. This produces a list of highly qualified (admittedly, Elsevier journals are good) potential editors-in-chief who are free!! Approach them for OA journals. If you are lucky, they bring their complete editorial board and you can kick-start an excellent OA journal.

February 09, 2012 10:59 pm 



Richard Poynder said...

Dear all,

There have been a number of ad hominem remarks made about Alicia Wise here in the last few days. I moderate comments, so I was able to review them before they went up, and as they were not very polite I also forwarded them to Alicia first.

Alicia insisted that they should be published, on the grounds that she did not want anyone's speech suppressed. She even responded to the first comment.

However, I personally do not believe that personal attacks are ever helpful. They certainly make it extremely difficult to have a rational discussion.

I would be most grateful, therefore, if in future people would refrain from making personal remarks about others. Let's have a civilised discussion!

Richard Poynder

February 10, 2012 2:22 pm 

Jan Velterop said...

There is talk about 'sustainable' and 'sustainability' quite a few times in the interview. Did you ask if that was sustainability of services or journals? Or of profit levels? Would a single journal that went from 35% profit to 10% profit (for instance because it was converted to 'gold' OA) still be regarded sustainable? And if that were to happen to the whole

journal programme, across the board? Benchmarking 'sustainability' would be an interesting thing.

February 10, 2012 4:45 pm 



Richard Poynder said...

These are important questions Jan. I have asked Alicia if she can respond.

February 11, 2012 9:42 am 



Alicia Wise @wisealic said...

Thanks, Richard, and hi, Jan -

When I talk about sustainable open access models or sustainability generally, I am talking about sustainable journals and services.

With kind wishes,

Alicia

February 11, 2012 11:09 am 

John Christensen, Science Librarian said...

As a science librarian I have watched Elsevier and other commercial publisher's costs erode our materials budgets for the past 30 years. I have even written several articles analysing the costs using word counts of articles in which I found that articles published in commercial journals cost our library 4 times as much as articles published in non-profit journals. I have also been aware of the continual double digit profits of Elsevier and other commercial publishers while our library budgets have sometimes seen no increase or even been reduced.

I have heard Elsevier argue that it has seen the error of its past ways and is trying to be a good citizen now by holding down its price increases. However, when your journals are already hugely expensive (Brain Research is currently around \$24,000 for an annual subscription), how much help is a 2% or 3% increase on an already hugely expensive journal.

I suspect that Elsevier's bottom line still shows double digit profits while paying their executives 6 and probably in some cases 7 figure salaries.

I hope the current boycott is successful. I hope that authors turn to OA journals and/or journals published by their non-profit professional associations. We have the recent example in Topology where the entire editorial staff left a commercial journal because, at least partly, of disgust for the high price of the journal and started a much more reasonably priced journal. I hope that happens more.

Libraries are caught in the middle of this. We have been forced to cut and cut again and again in areas that were vulnerable to save "big deals" with companies like Elsevier. We have had little choice since that is where the articles were being published.

February 14, 2012 5:01 pm 

Sandy Thatcher said...

Those who oppose the RWA have yet to make a good case for why the NIH policy is the optimal solution for providing access to government-funded research. What you get, under that policy, is access to Green OA versions of articles (unless the publisher allows for posting of versions of record), which are less than fully satisfactory for scholarly citation purposes, and you only get even this access 12 months AFTER publication in a journal. That is a long time to wait for the latest research. Would it not be far preferable to mandate that all government agencies post IMMEDIATELY the FINAL research reports that funded scholars are required to submit? As for peer review, we are moving in the direction of post-publication crowd review anyway, so why does the NIH need the form of the article after peer review (but before copyediting, etc.)? What value does THAT peer review (which is for the purpose of academic accreditation) have for the public at large?

February 25, 2012 12:48 am 



Unknown said...

I hope that Alicia will still answer a question on this old post, and one that is perhaps only obliquely related to the subject.

What copyright agreement do authors of 'sponsored' article sign? I've emailed the address given on the relevant page, but received no response.

The standard copyright agreement is on the Elsevier website for all to see, so I see no harm in making public the other one (if it is indeed different).

February 27, 2012 11:55 pm 

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